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ABSTRACT

This paper promotes an undergraduate course that would discuss the great ideas of Plato, St. Paul, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Jean Paul Sartre, B. F. Skinner, and Konrad Lorenz. This course would help students understand human values and behaviors while focusing on historical, world, and national problems. Tentative solutions would then be discussed. The course outline follows the seven theories listed in Leslie Stevenson's "Seven Theories of Human Nature," An extensive bibliography of background readings is included. (DJC)

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Nature, Human Nature, and Solutions to Problems

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Abstract

Great ideas ought to be applied in the present if we expect to change the future. Instead, we often repeat the mistakes of history because we are ignorant of history (shades of Santayana), or because we apply wrong ideas, or because we apply right ideas, wrongly, etc. Consider some of the insights of the following Occidental seven: Plato, St. Paul, Marx, Freud, Sartre, Skinner, Lorenz. How would we apply their writings to our current problems of materialism, immorality, poverty, ethnicism, war, holocausts, etc? And what about non-Occidental theorists (e.g., African, Asian, Middle-Eastern, Hispanic, Native or Indian)?

Nature, Human Nature, and Solutions to Problems

Great ideas, whether considered correct or incorrect, ought to be the mainstay of an educated person. The notion of an "honors" course needs to be broadened. Most students should attempt to understand significant aspects of our heritages, especially as thoughts, feelings, values, and behaviors. We need to focus more on notions of the universe, notions of human nature, problems as noted in history, problems as noted in the world, problems as noted in our nation, and tentative solutions to better our understanding, appreciation, and communication of existence.

Professor Leslie Stevenson, logician, has written an excellent text, Seven Theories of Human Nature (2nd ed.), published by Oxford University Press in 1987 (available in hardback and softback). His focus is on prototypical ideas rather than prototypical books. The text is essentially delimited to our Occidental heritage. Other areas of our non-Occidential heritages are of critical importance and should be addressed. Consider other courses related to our heritages, e.g., African or Black, Asian or Oriental, Middle-Eastern, Hispanic, and various Native or Indian. There are many great ideas, but the course proposed will focus on aspects of written history in the Occident. This would be one step, only, needed among many to illuminate our international and intercultural roots.

Fortunately, we still attempt to educate our undergraduate students, at least for part of their curriculum. Our graduate and

professional students are trained. This course is intended for undergraduates, who could range from so-called freshmen to seniors. There would be no prerequisites, other than college standing.

The aim is to disseminate language and principles that have had and continue to have a tremendous impact upon us. Values are critical. What values have the key theorists (each a prototype) espoused? What did they focus upon? Of course, the rightness or wrongness of the notions, by and large, is open to question. But immersing ourselves in basic problems and in proposed solutions might prepare us better for life in college and for life after college. What about the possibility of life after death (continuing existence)?

The course would begin with inquiry and end with further inquiry. The seven theories listed by Stevenson are:

Plato: The Rule of the Wise

Chrisitianity: God's Salvation

Marx: Communist Revolution

Freud: Psychoanalysis

Sartre: Atheistic Existentialism

Skinner: The Conditioning of Behavior

Lorenz: Innate Aggression

The text, a thin book of about 147 (5 1/4" by 8") pages, will be elaborated upon. Rather than focusing on a thick tome and then outlining the material and focussing on some aspects of the material, this course will fling open the possibilities. Rather

than maxima decreased to minima, consider minima increased to optima. Dictionaries (glossaries) for most of the areas are available (see Bibliography) and would be in library reference or in library reserve. The dictionaries (glossaries) are a language aid, and optional.

This course could be listed under social studies and/or under humanities and/or under other areas. Departments and colleges need to interact and integrate rather than isolate and segregate.

The main theorists are considered individually and interactively. We substitute St. Paul for Christianity and develop an appreciation of Judaism (including Rabbi Gamaliel), Christianity, and Islam. Among the main theorists, where are there agreements and disagreements, similarities and differences? Disagreements and differences between and among writings (ad verbum, not ad hominem) should add "spice" to the course.

If nothing else, the student may learn an "openness" to natures, problems, and solutions. For example, Freud believed only in the body, but worked only with the mind. Few persons would consider Freud an optimist (idealist) with regard to the human foibles of sex, aggression, narcissim, and greed; but was he a realist or a pessimist (cynic)? If one is not "open" to newness and change, will "simple faith" suffice? What is "simple faith"? What about liberals? Can persons be so liberal so as to stand for nothing?

Why great ideas rather than great books? Our bias? Our rationalization? We say that we prefer to focus on the present

and the future, especially in lectures and discussions. The past gives us potential strengths, but insights of the past ought to be applied to the present and to the future. Consider the timeless and the timely. Then (past) to now (present) to then (future). Though (in humor), history gives us lies, biography gives us worse lies, and autobiography gives us the worst lies.

The Great Books have been taught at Columbia College, University of Chicago, University of Virginia, St. John's College, and Magdalen College. A movement has begun wherein the Great Books, The Syntopicon, may eventually be analyzed and synthesized into The Great Ideas Syntopicon. This would become a vast assemblage of seminal ideas (though again, with a focus on the Occident).

At this time, let us consider philosophy and art and science, innateness and maturation and learning, hard determinism and choice and free will, conscious and preconscious and unconscious, materiality and duality and triality, morality and amorality and immorality, person and society and ecology, humanitas and deus and Deus, etc. Let us consider hunger, proverty, disease, war, false evangelists, racism, ethnicism, sexism, age-ism, creationism, evolution, sociobiology, holocausts (Nazi, nuclear), etc.

Towards such foregrounds, consider the backgrounds in the Bibliography. Try to obtain the latest editions.

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